



## The Effect of Applying The Affirmation Relaxation Method On Students' Academic Stress

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effectiveness of the Affirmation Relaxation Method in reducing academic stress among students. Conducted at SMA Daarul Amanah, an Islamic-based high school in Majalengka, West Java, the research used a quantitative pre-experimental design with a one-group pretest-posttest model. Due to the dual demands of general and Islamic education, students are particularly vulnerable to academic stress. The sample consisted of 12 students from class XI, selected from a total population of 53. The intervention was grounded in three theoretical frameworks: Relaxation Response Theory, which emphasizes physiological calm influenced by belief; Self-Affirmation Theory, which focuses on behavior and cognitive resilience; and academic stress theory, which explains stress responses in educational contexts. A modified stress measurement tool was used to suit the school's environment. Data analysis using a paired sample t-test revealed a significant reduction in stress levels. The pretest average was 117.75, while the posttest average dropped to 63.58, indicating a 54% decrease. The statistical result (sig. 2-tailed = 0.001 < 0.05) confirms a significant effect of the affirmation relaxation method on reducing academic stress. These findings suggest that the Affirmation Relaxation Method can be an effective and practical approach to managing academic stress in educational settings, particularly within schools with religious and academic integration.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education has an important meaning in human life, especially for a student. Education is very meaningful for someone if it is carried out seriously and earnestly, because it will help in meeting the needs of life and determining the quality of the future in a person's life (Sanrock, J. W, 2007). In a school environment, a student has many needs to fulfill their academic responsibilities. In addition, parents encourage and emphasize children to excel academically and maintain it to meet the needs of themselves and their families in the future (Rosanti, 2022).

In Indonesia, there are various types of schools, including those based on religion, arts, and vocational. Islamic-based schools have a curriculum and provisions that are applied, including students are required to study Islam, not just general academics and general knowledge. Therefore, it is possible that students experience stress in their lives while studying. Stress is a common problem for humans. In addition, stress is part of modern human life (Kupriyanov & Zhdanov, 2014).

Certain students experience academic stress as a result of the academic process that is not easy for them (Taufik, T., Ildil, I., & Ardi, Z. 2013). In addition, school life is a major source of academic stress for adolescents, especially students (Froggatt, 2017). Stress comes from the interaction between a person and their environment, which creates a perception of the relationship between a person's psychological, biological, and social systems (Sarafino, 1994). The student learning process can cause academic stress. This stress can be caused by the burden of learning and diverse social circles. This can reduce academic grades and make it difficult for students to quickly adjust to changes in their environment (Ni'matuzahroh & Adawiyah, 2016). Various student attitudes, such as irregular eating, rushing, difficulty controlling emotions, and rarely socializing, are also considered academic stress (Aryani, 2016). Academic stress is stress that comes from the learning process, such as moving up a class, anxiety about school exams, the number of assignments to be completed, fear of getting bad grades, making decisions about majors and careers, and time management. High school students are faced with various demands, both schoolwork, family problems, environmental problems, and themselves (Nurmaliyah, 2014). Academic stress is a type of stress that is included in the distress category (Rahmawati, W. K & Adawiyah, R, 2017). Academic stress is defined as a condition experienced by someone as a result of their academic condition, which includes physical reactions, thoughts, and negative emotions that arise.

According to WHO (1995) High school students in grade XI are included in the late adolescent group, namely 17-19 years old, that age is in a complex thinking phase (Poltekes Depkes Jakarta I, 2010). Adolescents show a significant increase in cortisol in response to stress compared to children in the middle population. Children cortisol children show a significant increase in cortisol compared to children in the middle population (Stroud et al., 2009). If students receive pressure from within themselves and from their external environment, they can experience shock (Hurlock, 1980). In adolescence, students have the characteristics of adults, who face problems on their own without the help of others.

Researchers found problems in Islamic schools or under the responsibility of the Pondok Pesantren Foundation. Because of the unlimited learning approach, students in these schools are very vulnerable to academic stress. The researcher chose SMA Daarul Amanah because of the background of the school which is based on Islam because the existence of Islamic Boarding Schools makes students who enter and leave the Islamic Boarding School feel that school is a heavy burden for them to bear every day. Islamic-based schools make students'

lives difficult. They face difficulties in managing their education as a whole, as well as the Islamic education in the school. Stress related to education can be associated with oneself. When someone faces a stressful situation or condition, they try to overcome it by using various behaviors as much as possible, both positive and negative (Cooper & Davidson, 1991). Affirmation relaxation techniques can help someone respond to a threat as a basis for changing attitudes and behavior, the next response is how an individual can adapt to a threat (Ayu & Yunike, 2020).

Researchers hope to reduce the level of stress experienced by high school students, especially students at SMA Daarul Amanah, by implementing the affirmation relaxation method. One of the problems faced is the focus of learning that is not one-way, but with Islamic-based schools, religious learning is more dominant than general learning which results in many students feeling they have chosen the wrong school and some even want to drop out of school because of their inability to adapt to the environment. Therefore, relaxation techniques function as a way to help students reduce the stress they experience because of their studies and teach them how to deal with stress in a way that is easy for them to do themselves. Of course, accurate and relevant data is needed for research. Therefore, researchers use observation, questionnaires, documentation, and literature to obtain data. With this method, researchers can obtain data directly at SMA Daarul Amanah as the research location.

## 2. METHODS

The method used by the researcher is a quantitative method with a pre-experimental design with a pretest-posttest one group design model. The respondents in this study were samples from the study, namely 12 students of class XI SMA Daarul Amanah. In the study, one sample group will carry out a pretest first to determine the level of academic stress experienced by each student. The questionnaire used by the researcher for the pretest was the Student-Life Stress Inventory (SSI) (Gadzella, 1991) which was then modified by the researcher by adjusting it to the research location, namely at the high school student level to measure the level of academic stress experienced by students of SMA Daarul Amanah Rajagaluh, Majalengka. To measure the level of academic stress experienced by students, the researcher changed the instrument to suit the research locus using a Likert scale. The Likert scale measurement used in the questionnaire created by the researcher is as follows in **Table 1**.

**Table 1.** The Likert Scale Measurement

No	Information	Score
1.	Never	1
2.	Rarely	2
3.	Sometimes	3
4.	Often	4
5.	Always	5

The Effect of Affirmation Relaxation Method on Students' Academic Stress in the Learning Process. The research implementation procedure begins with conducting a pretest to measure students' stress levels before being given treatment using the affirmation relaxation method. After the level of students' academic stress is known, treatment is given by practitioners with the affirmation relaxation method four times according to the indicators of

the success of the affirmation relaxation method. After the treatment is carried out, a posttest is carried out using the same questionnaire as the pretest.

This posttest is carried out to determine and re-measure the level of students' academic stress after being given treatment using the affirmation relaxation method. After the posttest is carried out, the results are analyzed and processed using IBM SPSS 30 software by conducting prerequisite testing and hypothesis testing. The results of the test are then concluded about the effect of the affirmation relaxation method on students' academic stress. After the data results are obtained, they are analyzed and processed using two tests, namely, prerequisite testing, namely the normality test and the homogeneity test, and hypothesis testing using the paired sample t-test. The following is a prerequisite test, the normality test is used to determine whether the data obtained is normally distributed data or not. The normality test used is the Kolmogorov-Smirnova metric for comparing data distribution.

In testing the normality of statistical hypotheses as follows:

$H_0$  : The sample comes from a population that has a normal data distribution.

$H_1$  : The sample comes from a population that does not have a normal data distribution.

And with the following decision-making criteria:

$H_0$  : Rejected if the significance value is more than 0.05;

$H_1$  : Accepted if the significance value is less than 0.05.

**Table 2.** Normality Test

Tests of Normality			
Shapiro-Wilk			
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pretest	0,927	12	0,349
Posttest	0,929	12	0,365

Based on the results of the normality (see **Table 2**) test with IBM SPSS version 27 with 12 respondents, the Shapiro Wilk statistical test was used. It can be seen in the table above that the significance value is at 0.349 and 0.365. This shows that the significance value is  $<0.05$ . Thus,  $H_0$  is rejected, which means that the value comes from normally distributed data. The next prerequisite test is the homogeneity test, namely to determine whether the data has the same or homogeneous characteristics. Because some statistical tests require that all variations come from normally distributed and homogeneous populations, a homogeneity test is performed. Variations from two samples are considered homogeneous (the same) if the significance value is greater.

In homogeneity testing, the statistical hypothesis is as follows:

$H_0$  : There is no difference in the variance of the sample groups.

$H_1$  : There is a difference in the variance of the sample groups.

With a significance level of 5%, the decision-making criteria are as follows.

$H_0$  is accepted if the significance value is  $> 0.05$

$H_1$  is rejected if the significance value is  $< 0.05$ .

If the data is homogeneous, the next step is to test the difference in average using the t-test, and if it is not homogeneous, it is done using the t'-test.

**Table 3.** Homogeneity PreTest

Test of Homogeneity of Variance					
		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Pretest	Based on Mean	2,625	1	10	0,136

Based on the results of the homogeneity test in the pretest (see **Table 3**), a significance value of 0.136 was obtained. This shows that the significance value is  $> 0.05$  so that  $H_1$  is accepted.

**Table 4.** Homogeneity PostTest

Test of Homogeneity of Variance					
		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Posttest	Based on Mean	9,908	1	10	0,01

Based on the results of the homogeneity test on the posttest (see **Table 4**), a significance value of 0.010 was obtained. This shows that the significance value  $< 0.05$  so that  $H_0$  is rejected. After the prerequisite test has been proven that the data is normally distributed and homogenous, then the hypothesis test is carried out with a paired sample t-test to see if there is a difference in the average of the paired samples. The test is carried out for two purposes. The first is to find significant statistical variations and the second is to evaluate the impact of the treatment on the sample groups before and after.

The hypothesis in the paired sample t-test is as follows:

Null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ): "There is no influence between the application of the affirmation relaxation method and students' academic stress".

Working hypothesis ( $H_1$ ): "There is an influence between the application of the affirmation relaxation method and students' academic stress"

With a significance level of 5%, the decision-making criteria are as follows:

$H_0$  is rejected if the significance value is  $> 0.05$

$H_1$  is accepted if the significance value is  $< 0.05$

The following is a presentation of data using the t-test or paired sample t-test:

**Table 5.** T-test Analysis

Tingkat Stres Akademik	Mean	Std. Deviation	P Value
Before <i>treatment</i>	117,75	22,864	0,001
After <i>treatment</i>	63,58	6,201	

In the **Table 5**, the average level of academic stress before being given treatment was 117.75 with a standard deviation of 22.864, while the average level of academic stress after being given treatment showed an average value of 63.58 with a standard deviation of 6.201. There was a decrease in the level of academic stress between before and after being given treatment of 54.17 with a percentage of 54%. So the results of the paired sample t test obtained a P value of  $0.001 < 0.05$ , which means that there is a significant difference in the level of academic stress before and after being given affirmation relaxation technique treatment.

**Table 5.** Pair Samples Test Analysis

		Paired Samples Test			
		Paired Differences			
		Mean	Standar Deviation	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Pretest-Posttest	54,167	17,616	12	<0,001

Test criteria:

$H_1$  rejected if : Sig >  $\alpha = 0,001 > 0,05$

$H_0$  accepted if : Sig <  $\alpha = 0,001 < 0,05$

The results of the statistical test with paired sample test showed a sig. value (2 tailed) of  $0.001 < 0.05$ , so  $H_1$  is accepted. And it can be concluded that there is an influence between affirmation relaxation techniques on students' academic stress. The results of the paired simple test showed that there was a change between the pretest and posttest scores, so it can be seen that the treatment given to overcome academic stress can handle or reduce academic stress experienced by students at SMA Daarul Amanah Rajagaluh, Majalengka.

Therefore, the affirmation relaxation method can be used as an alternative to reduce the level of stress experienced by students due to academic studies. Therefore, the affirmation relaxation method can be used as a treatment method to reduce academic stress.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Results

The research conducted using a pre-experimental design research type to determine the effect of affirmation relaxation techniques on academic stress of class XI students at SMA Daarul Amanah Rajagaluh, Majalengka. In the study, one group or one class was needed to be used as a research sample. The stages passed by one class, namely class XI, were pretest, treatment and posttest. The pretest stage was conducted to determine the level of academic stress experienced by class XI students at SMA Daarul Amanah and was the initial step before providing treatment. The next stage was providing treatment or implementing the affirmation relaxation method to deal with students' academic stress. Treatment was given four times by making the indicator of the success of the affirmation relaxation technique a service topic in the Service Implementation Plan (RPL) used by researchers as a guideline for implementing the research. And the last stage was the implementation of the posttest, to determine whether there was a change in the level of academic stress of students after being given the affirmation relaxation technique.

The pretest process was conducted on Thursday, January 2, 2025, in class XI SMA Daarul Amanah. 12 students completed the questionnaire, which was given by the practitioner. The pretest went well. The pretest results showed that students in class XI SMA Daarul Amanah

experienced high levels of academic stress. This is because the academic stress questionnaire consists of 46 statements based on five indicators of academic stress that can be adjusted to each student's situation. Among the criteria for categorizing academic stress levels are:

**Table 6.** Classification Academic Stress

Norm	Category	Score
$X \geq (\mu + 1\alpha)$	High	$X \geq 70$
$(\mu - 1\alpha) \leq X < (\mu + 1\alpha)$	Moderate	$-10 \leq X < 70$
$X < (\mu - 1\alpha)$	Low	$X < -10$

The **Table 6** divides the classification criteria for academic stress levels into three categories: the "high" category has an X score of more than 70, meaning that the value or questionnaire result exceeding 70 is included in the "high" category; the "moderate" category has an X score of less than 70, meaning that the value or questionnaire result exceeding 70 is included in the "moderate" category; and the "low" category has a score.

The pretest results showed that academic stress elements such as frustration, conflict, pressure, change, and self-imposed showed high levels of stress in the academic stress category (Gadzella & Masten, 2005). Therefore, students of SMA Daarul Amanah Rajagaluh, Majalengka, need treatment to reduce academic stress. The following is a **Table 7** of the implementation process of the treatment stage.

**Table 7.** Treatment Stage

Day/Date	Activity	Class	Topic
Thursday, 02 January 2025	Pretest	XI	Pretest
Saturday, 04 January 2025	Treatment 1	XI	Calm Atmosphere
Saturday, 11 January 2025	Treatment 2	XI	Mental Devices
Saturday, 18 January 2025	Treatment 3	XI	Passive Attitude
Saturday, 25 January 2025	Treatment 4	XI	Comfortable Position
Saturday, 01 Februari 2025	Posttest	XI	Posttest

The research was conducted during six meetings in accordance with the Service Implementation Plan (RPL). The schedule of implementation and arrival of practitioners to the school used as the research locus is described above.

After the treatment was given, a posttest was carried out to determine the differences and reduction in research data, as follows in **Table 8**.

Furthermore, five aspects of academic stress have been included in the questionnaire, which are adjusted to the indicators covering each element (Gadzella & Masten, 2005). These aspects include frustration, conflict, pressures, change, and self-imposed. The results of the initial test or pretest showed that the recognition relaxation method can reduce students'



academic stress. This method shows a calm atmosphere, mental devices, passive attitudes, and comfortable positions (Benson & Proctor, 2000).

**Table 8.** The Reduction of Data

Aspect	Indicators	Reduction Level
1. Frustration & conflict	<b>Calm Atmosphere</b>	17,833
	a. Category 3 (Self)	15,667
	b. Category 5 (Emotional towards stressful situations)	
2. Pressures	<b>Mental Devices</b>	14,84
	a. Category 1 (Experienced stress)	
3. Change	<b>Passive Attitude</b>	15,750
	a. Category 2 (Changes experienced)	11,125
	b. Category 6 (Behavior towards stress)	
4. Self-Imposed	<b>Comfortable Position</b>	14,000
	a. Category 4 (Reaction to stressors)	14,000
	b. Category 7 (Cognitive appraisal)	

### 3.2. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate a significant reduction in academic stress levels among students following the implementation of the affirmation relaxation method. The pretest results indicated a mean score of 117.75, categorized as high academic stress, which subsequently decreased to 63.58, falling within the moderate category after the intervention. This substantial reduction of 54.17 points represents a 46% decrease in academic stress levels, indicating the effectiveness of the affirmation relaxation technique.

The affirmation relaxation method employed in this study incorporates four essential components identified by Benson and Proctor (2000): a calm atmosphere, mental devices (such as positive affirmations), passive attitudes, and comfortable positions. These elements work synergistically to activate the relaxation response, which is physiologically opposite to the stress response (Benson, 1975). The relaxation response triggers parasympathetic nervous system activation, leading to decreased heart rate, blood pressure, and cortisol levels while promoting a sense of calm and well-being (McCallie et al., 2006).

The integration of positive affirmations within the relaxation framework addresses both the physiological and cognitive aspects of stress. Affirmations help restructure negative thought patterns and self-defeating beliefs commonly associated with academic pressure (Cricher & Dunning, 2015). This cognitive restructuring aligns with Beck's cognitive theory, which suggests that maladaptive thoughts contribute significantly to stress and anxiety (Beck et al., 1979).

These findings are consistent with previous studies examining relaxation techniques in educational settings. Shapiro et al. (2007) found that mindfulness-based stress reduction programs significantly reduced anxiety and improved academic performance among university students. Similarly, Deckro et al. (2002) demonstrated that relaxation response training decreased psychological distress and improved quality of life in medical students.

The effectiveness observed in this study among class XI students of SMA Daarul Amanah Rajagaluh, Majalengka, supports the growing body of evidence suggesting that relaxation interventions are particularly beneficial for adolescents facing academic pressures (Klainin-Yobas et al., 2015). The high school environment, characterized by increased academic



demands, college preparation pressures, and developmental challenges, creates an ideal context for stress management interventions (Sulkowski et al., 2014).

The study's results highlight the potential for students to independently utilize the affirmation relaxation method as a self-management tool. This finding is particularly significant as it promotes student autonomy and self-efficacy in stress management (Bandura, 1977). When students develop competence in managing their own stress responses, they are better equipped to handle future academic challenges and maintain psychological well-being throughout their educational journey (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007).

The method's accessibility and ease of implementation make it particularly suitable for integration into daily academic routines. Unlike complex therapeutic interventions that require professional supervision, the affirmation relaxation technique can be practiced independently in various settings, including classrooms, study areas, or home environments (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

The findings suggest that incorporating stress management techniques like affirmation relaxation into the educational curriculum could significantly benefit student well-being and academic performance. Schools could implement these techniques as part of guidance and counseling programs or integrate them into regular classroom activities during high-stress periods such as examinations (Durlak et al., 2011).

Furthermore, training teachers and counselors in these techniques could create a more supportive academic environment where stress management becomes a shared responsibility between educators and students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). This approach aligns with the growing recognition of the importance of social-emotional learning in educational settings.

While this study demonstrates promising results, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study focused specifically on class XI students at one institution, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other age groups or educational contexts. Future research should examine the effectiveness of affirmation relaxation across diverse populations and educational settings.

Additionally, long-term follow-up studies are needed to assess the sustained effects of the intervention and whether students continue to utilize these techniques independently over time. Research examining the optimal frequency and duration of practice sessions would also provide valuable insights for implementation.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The significant reduction in academic stress levels observed in this study provides compelling evidence for the effectiveness of the affirmation relaxation method in educational settings. The intervention's ability to promote student self-efficacy in stress management while being easily implementable makes it a valuable tool for addressing the growing concern of academic stress among students. These findings contribute to the expanding literature on evidence-based stress management interventions in educational contexts and support the integration of such techniques into comprehensive student support programs..

#### 5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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